



Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

Misc

January 31, 2002

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks proposes to install a boat ramp at the **Widow Coulee Fishing Access Site** located on the Missouri River approximately two river miles below the mouth of Belt Creek.

This proposed boat ramp affords the public improved access to a reach of the Missouri River that has been difficult to get to because of limited public opportunity and challenging terrain. The road development and other access improvements (parking lot, latrine, signing) have already been put in place by PPL Montana and other partners.

The estimate for the boat ramp development would cost approximately \$28,000. The property is owned by PPL Montana and managed by FWP through a coop management agreement.

A copy of the Draft Environmental Assessment evaluating this project is enclosed. For questions and comments contact FWP Region Four Headquarters at 4600 Giant Springs Road, Great Falls MT 59405 or call 454-5840. Comments will be accepted until 5:00 p.m., March 8th, 2002 and can be mailed to:

Widow Coulee FAS Boat Ramp
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Attention: Dave Todd
4600 Giant Springs Road
Great Falls, MT 59405

Or e-mailed to: dtodd@state.mt.us

Thanks for your interest and help with this project.

Sincerely,

Mike Aderhold
Regional Supervisor

Cassadee Charteau

MEPA/NEPA/HB495 CHECKLIST

DRAFT

Misc

PART I. PROPOSED ACTION DESCRIPTION

1. Type of Proposed State Action

Install a boat ramp at Widow Coulee Fishing Access Site.

2. Agency Authority for the Proposed Action

FWP has authority to acquire and develop lands for recreational purposes through agreement. 87-1-209 MCA. FWP has a long-term management agreement with PPL Montana to manage the Widow Coulee Fishing Access Site provided by the power company. This access for the public, in part, fulfills the power company's #2188 FERC License requirements.

3. Name of Project

Widow Coulee FAS Boat Ramp

4. Name, Address and Phone Number of Project Sponsor (if other than the agency)

MFWP Sponsored

5. If Applicable:

Estimated Construction/Commencement Date Fall 2002

Estimated Completion Date Fall 2002

Current Status of Project Design (% complete) 0%

6. Location Affected by Proposed Action (county, range and township)

Chouteau County, Montana, on the east shore of the Missouri River, north of Morony Dam, in Section 25, T22N, R5E. This is on PPL Montana company property.

7. Project Size: Estimate the number of acres that would be directly affected that are currently:

(a) Developed:

industrial

(d) Floodplain <.1

(e) Productive:

other.....

8. Map/site plan: attach an original 8 1/2" x 11" or larger section of the most recent USGS 7.5' series topographic map showing the location and boundaries of the area that would be affected by the proposed action. A different map scale may be substituted if more appropriate or if required by agency rule. If available, a site plan should also be attached.
9. Listing of any other Local, State or Federal agency that has overlapping or additional jurisdiction.

(a) Permits:

<u>Agency Name</u>	<u>Permit</u>	<u>Date</u>
FWP	124	
FWP	318 water quality authorization	
Army Corps of Engineers	404	
Department of Environmental Quality	storm water discharge permit	

(b) Funding:

<u>Agency Name</u>	<u>Funding Amount</u>
FWP	\$35,000

(c) Other Overlapping or Additional Jurisdictional Responsibilities:

<u>Agency Name</u>	<u>Type of Responsibility</u>
PPL Montana	property owner and responsible for river access as described in the FERC License #2188

PPL Montana has given permission to use portions of their May 2000 Environmental Assessment which evaluated all other aspects of site development for the Widow Coulee Fishing Access Site. FWP is required to do this EA since funding for the boat ramp comes from State of Montana resources.

10. Narrative summary of the proposed action or project including the benefits and purpose of the proposed action:

Install a boat ramp off of the previously built parking lot.

Recreational river access development was proposed on this property as mitigation associated with the FERC Project 2188 relicensing process for PPL Montana Missouri/Madison Hydropower Projects. Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks desires to cooperate and assist in providing river access opportunities to the Missouri River in service to the fishing and floating public.

The subject property was identified as a mitigation site by citizen advisory and agency technical committees made up of local recreationists, and representatives from Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP), Bureau of Land Management (BLM), U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and Cascade and Chouteau counties. Improvements proposed at the site included a graveled parking lot, a sealed-vault latrine and a boat ramp. The developed part of the access site is fenced to control vehicular and cattle use. Cultural resource sites on PPL Montana property, but not on the river access site, are fenced. The parking lot was completed by the fall 2000 by PPL Montana; the remainder of the improvements except the boat ramp was completed in the fall of 2001.

11. List of agencies consulted during preparation of the EA:

PPL Montana
FWP

PART II. ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

1. Evaluation of the impacts of the Proposed Action including secondary and cumulative impacts on the Physical and Human Environment.

A. PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

1. <u>LAND RESOURCES</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated*	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
a. **Soil instability or changes in geologic substructure?		X				
b. Disruption, displacement, erosion, compaction, moisture loss, or over-covering of soil which would reduce productivity or fertility?			X		X	1b.
c. **Destruction, covering or modification of any unique geologic or physical features?		X				
d. Changes in siltation, deposition or erosion patterns that may modify the channel of a river or stream or the bed or shore of a lake?			X			1d.
e. Exposure of people or property to earthquakes, landslides, ground failure, or other natural hazard?		X				
f. Other:			X			1f.

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

1b. Access site development has involved minor soil disturbance during construction, and the boat ramp would modify the shoreline to a negligible degree.

1d. Boat ramp design will minimize affects on streambed and shoreline.

1f. The new access development partially completed this last year has greatly increased the amount of traffic in this area. Also the new Many Hills BMA will add traffic that will get to know this area and utilize it in the future. A number of off road citations were issued at the FAS site and the associated BMA and neighboring landowners. More violations are likely to be associated with the site as more people discover the site. Enforcement, signing and fencing have mitigated this potential impact. PPL Montana has implemented erosion control measures to minimize erosion and mitigate soil disturbance on the access entry road.

* Include a narrative explanation under Part III describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or can not be evaluated.

* Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM)

* Determine whether the described impact may result and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.

**** Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

2. <u>AIR</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated*	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
a. **Emission of air pollutants or deterioration of ambient air quality? (also see 13 (c))			X			2a.
b. Creation of objectionable odors?		X				
c. Alteration of air movement, moisture, or temperature patterns or any change in climate, either locally or regionally?		X				
d. Adverse effects on vegetation, including crops, due to increased emissions of pollutants?		X				
e. ***For P-R/D-J projects, will the project result in any discharge, which will conflict with federal or state air quality regs? (Also see 2a)		X				
f. Other:						

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Air Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

2a. During construction of the boat ramp minor and temporary cumulative effects on air quality would occur from construction machinery and dust.

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3. <u>WATER</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated*	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
a. *Discharge into surface water or any alteration of surface water quality including but not limited to temperature, dissolved oxygen or turbidity?		X				
b. Changes in drainage patterns or the rate and amount of surface runoff?		X				
c. Alteration of the course or magnitude of floodwater or other flows?		X				
d. Changes in the amount of surface water in any water body or creation of a new water body?		X				
e. Exposure of people or property to water related hazards such as flooding?			X			3e.
f. Changes in the quality of groundwater?		X				
g. Changes in the quantity of groundwater?		X				
h. Increase in risk of contamination of surface or groundwater?		X				
i. Effects on any existing water right or reservation?		X				
j. Effects on other water users as a result of any alteration in surface or groundwater quality?		X				
k. Effects on other users as a result of any alteration in surface or groundwater quantity?		X				
l. ****For P-R/D-J, will the project affect a designated floodplain? (Also see 3c)		X				
m. ***For P-R/D-J, will the project result in any discharge that will affect federal or state water quality regulations? (Also see 3a)		X				
n. Other:						

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Water Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

3e. Recreationists would be exposed to a slightly higher public safety risk in the unlikely event that one of the upstream dams failed. PPL Montana has in place an emergency action plan. This impact is unavoidable if the public chooses to visit the site.

The other problem associated with the FAS is that floaters will now be able to put in at Morony Dam and float down stream to a relatively close take-out point. There are substantial drops and dangerous water obstacles in this section of the river and the Enforcement Division along with the Cascade County Sheriffs office and Choteau County Sheriffs office will be called upon to handle the search and rescue efforts needed to keep people safe.

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4. <u>VEGETATION</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
a. Changes in the diversity, productivity or abundance of plant species (including trees, shrubs, grass, crops, and aquatic plants)?			X		*	4a.
b. Alteration of a plant community?		X				
c. Adverse effects on any unique, rare, threatened, or endangered species?		X				
d. Reduction in acreage or productivity of any agricultural land?		X				
e. Establishment or spread of noxious weeds?			X			4e.
f. ****For P-R/D-J, will the project affect wetlands, or prime and unique farmland?		X				
g. Other:						

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

4a. Development of the boat ramp directly affects a very small portion of the PPL Montana owned 74 acre parcel; a portion of which was used in the past for grazing. The power company still leases the nearly 70 acres outside the fenced out access site for grazing. Existing stands of leafy spurge and spotted knapweed (along with future weed species) would be controlled on an annual basis.

4e. If off-road vehicle use increased in the vicinity due to increased public access, the secondary impacts of weed spread, vegetation removal, soil erosion and compaction, and siltation could occur. Signing, fencing and enforcement of rules measures by FWP have already begun and will help control off-road use. See comments in 1f.

*

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** 5. FISH/WILDLIFE Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
a. Deterioration of critical fish or wildlife habitat?		X				
b. Changes in the diversity or abundance of game animals or bird species?			X			5b.
c. Changes in the diversity or abundance of nongame species?			X			5c.
d. Introduction of new species into an area?		X				
e. Creation of a barrier to the migration or movement of animals?		X				
f. Adverse effects on any unique, rare, threatened, or endangered species?		X				
g. Increase in conditions that stress wildlife populations or limit abundance (including harassment, legal or illegal harvest or other human activity)?			X			5g.
h. ****For P-R/D-J, will the project be performed in any area in which T&E species are present, and will the project affect any T&E species or their habitat? (Also see 5f)		X				
i. ***For P-R/D-J, will the project introduce or export any species not presently or historically occurring in the receiving location? (Also see 5d)			X			5i.
j. Other:						

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

5b. The site supports habitat typical of the local area: dry land benches and river edge used by mule deer, grouse, ducks, and geese. Non-game species include raccoons, beaver, skunks, mice and a variety of songbirds. No evidence of bald eagle nests was present, but eagles commonly work the river in this area and may perch on or near the site. The nearest reported bald eagle nest is 5 miles downstream of Highwood Creek, several miles downstream of the proposed access site (Kristi Dubois, personal communication, 4/20/00).

5c. This section of the Missouri River is considered a transition zone between warm- and cold-water fisheries, and supports 20 to 30 species of fish. There are two sensitive species; the blue sucker (*Cycleptus elongatus*) and the sauger (*Stizostedion canadense*) have been found in this reach of the Missouri (Montana Natural Heritage Program, April 21, 2000 and Bill Gardner, January 14, 2002). Recent fish surveys have shown that these species are uncommon in this reach of the Missouri, however. Therefore, little impact is expected to the blue sucker as a result of this project. Providing access to the river here will allow additional angler access to a rich fishery with little biological impact (Steve Leathe, personal communication, 4/20/00).

5g. Development of the road and access site has increased human activity in the area. Subsequent to construction, recreationists and hunter use of the site and adjacent DNRC lands have increased human activity and thus disturb area wildlife to a minor degree, primarily during summer and fall. Temporary and seasonal closures of the access road (for public safety) may be made during poor weather and winter months due to the road's steep and narrow character. Closures may also result during grain harvest to accommodate the needs of adjacent landowners and to reduce their potential conflicts with recreational traffic. Closures would have the secondary effect of reducing impacts on area wildlife, but will increase workload on Enforcement Division.

An increase in the amount of walleye fisherman to the area is expected which will target sauger in the Missouri River during times they are most vulnerable. (Terry Hill, personal communication, 1/11/02)

5i. Floating would increase as a result of this development, in turn increasing disturbance of waterfowl broods to a minor and temporary degree over the current situation.

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B. HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

6. <u>NOISE/ELECTRICAL EFFECTS</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
a. Increases in existing noise levels?			X			6a.
b. Exposure of people to serve or nuisance noise levels?		X				
c. Creation of electrostatic or electromagnetic effects that could be detrimental to human health or property?		X				
d. Interference with radio or television reception and operation?		X				
e. Other:						

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

6a. Noise levels would increase temporarily during construction and on a seasonal basis at the access site. This impact is considered minor because the level of activity at the site is projected to be relatively low and because very few people live in the vicinity.

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7. <u>LAND USE</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
a. Alteration of or interference with the productivity or profitability of the existing land use of an area?		X				7a.
b. Conflicted with a designated natural area or area of unusual scientific or educational importance?		X				
c. Conflict with any existing land use whose presence would constrain or potentially prohibit the proposed action?		X				
d. Adverse effects on or relocation of residences?		X				
e. Other:			X			7e.

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

7a. As a result of this project, grazing has been curtailed on 1 acre of PPL Montana land; the remaining 73 acres are undeveloped.

7e. An increase in vandalism has resulted from this project, both to public and private property. The site is remote and well away from public roads and residences, so the potential for vandalism to signs and facilities, and to the abandoned equipment yard on neighboring property will be evaluated. There already has been an increase in vandalism with buildings, signs being shot and the finding remains of a methamphetamine lab at the site. Enforcement will have to have a regular presence in the area to help deter this problem, although they will not be able to stop all vandalism.

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8. <u>RISK/HEALTH HAZARDS</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
a. Risk of an explosion or release of hazardous substances (including, but not limited to oil, pesticides, chemicals, or radiation) in the event of an accident or other forms of disruption?		X				8a.
b. Affect an existing emergency response or emergency evacuation plan or create a need for a new plan?		X				
c. Creation of any human health hazard or potential hazard?			X			8c.
d. ***For P-R/D-J, will any chemical toxicants be used? (Also see 8a)						
e. Other:		X				

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

8a. Chemical weed control methods are used on the access site and along the access road. Chemical applications are made in accordance with precautions already in place at other PPL Montana/FWP cooperatively managed sites. Biological control of insects may also occur at the access site, particularly because stands are in close proximity to water, limiting use of some chemicals. Chouteau County is currently contracted for weed control complying with the FWP Region Four Weed Management Plan.

8c. A minor unavoidable increase in human safety risks occurs from driving the steep and narrow access road, from a potential for increased fire hazard if fires are built illegally, and from discharge of firearms during hunting. Mitigations to address these hazards include: 1) signing the access road as steep, narrow, temporarily closing the road in inclement weather and winter, and providing pullouts and one-way signing at steep, narrow road sections; 2) removing woody debris from the access site to eliminate a fuel source, not providing fire rings or grills, and signing the site to prohibit fires; 3) enforcing hunting regulations and following up on complaints received in the area; and 4) possible increase operations funding and personnel for enforcement.

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9. <u>COMMUNITY IMPACT</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
a. Alteration of the location, distribution, density, or growth rate of the human population of an area?		X				
b. Alteration of the social structure of a community?		X				
c. Alteration of the level or distribution of employment or community or personal income?		X				
d. Changes in industrial or commercial activity?		X				
e. Increased traffic hazards or effects on existing transportation facilities or patterns of movement of people and goods?			X			9e.
f. Other:						

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

9e. FWP has observed that the site experiences 35-50 vehicles on peak weekends due to its proximity to population centers. The Highwood Road accessing the site is not usually a heavily traveled route, and is effectively signed at the intersection with the Salem Road. Therefore, traffic impacts are expected to be minor and seasonal. If warranted, conflicts with area landowners could be decreased by temporary closure of the access road during periods of harvest. Off-road vehicle use could increase on both private and public land due to this development, and result in secondary effects of increased erosion, vegetation disturbance, and trespass.

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10. PUBLIC SERVICES/TAXES/UTILITIES	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
Will the proposed action result in:						
a. Will the proposed action have an effect upon or result in a need for new or altered governmental services in any of the following areas: fire or police protection, schools, parks/recreational facilities, roads or other public maintenance, water supply, sewer or septic systems, solid waste disposal, health, or other governmental services? If any, specify:			X			10a.
b. Will the proposed action have an effect upon the local or state tax base and revenues?		X				
c. Will the proposed action result in a need for new facilities or substantial alterations of any of the following utilities: electric power, natural gas, other fuel supply or distribution systems, or communications?		X				
d. Will the proposed action result in increased used of any energy source?			X			10d.
e. **Define projected revenue sources						10e.
f. **Define projected maintenance costs.						10f.
g. Other:						

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

10a. The need for additional governmental services would be minor. The access site is proposed as a pack in/pack out site for garbage. The sealed vault latrine will be pumped annually or as needed. The new boat ramp will need periodic cleaning of collected sediment. Enforcement of hunting and fishing regulations may increase to a minor degree in the area, in turn increasing these budgets to a minor degree.

10d. There will be a minimal amount of gasoline consumed directly attributed to motorized watercraft using this portion of the Missouri River and this specific access site.

10e. PPL Montana has budgeted \$200,000 to fund access site development and FWP has budgeted \$35,000 of Fishing License Funds specifically for the Widow Coulee boat ramp. Any contributions contributed by government agencies for 2188 License approved capital projects allows the power company to make like contributions to the Missouri-Madison Trust Account which be available for grant distribution in 2005.

10f. PPL Montana is providing FWP a maintenance budget for the life of the FERC 2188 License. The power company will provide a total of \$10,000 to fund management, enforcement, and maintenance for the access site. A portion of the budget will be available to Chouteau County for road maintenance to the site. Expect to see up to 10-15 motorized boats utilizing this FAS site in the future, with canoes and rafts only increasing the amount of watercraft on this portion of the river (Terry Hill, Warden Captain, personal communication, 1/11/02).

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** 11. AESTHETICS/RECREATION	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
Will the proposed action result in:						
a. Alteration of any scenic vista or creation of an aesthetically offensive site or effect that is open to public view?			X			11a.
b. Alteration of the aesthetic character of a community or neighborhood?		X				
c. **Alteration of the quality or quantity of recreational/tourism opportunities and settings? (Attach Tourism Report)			X			11c.
d. ***For P-R/D-J, will any designated or proposed wild or scenic rivers, trails or wilderness areas be impacted? (Also see 11a, 11c)		X				
e. Other:						

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

11a. Recreation opportunities would be increased as a result of this project. A cumulative benefit to public recreation opportunities would also result from development of this site along with the other recreational developments currently taking place along the Missouri River corridor, such as the Lewis & Clark Interpretive Center, Giant Springs State Park, the Rivers Edge Trail, and North Shore Trail improvements. There will also be a dramatic increase in waterfowl hunting use of this FAS site in the future (Terry Hill, Warden Captain, personal communication, 1/11/02).

11c. Recreationists using this stretch of the Missouri would benefit directly. Fishing opportunities would be increased in an area of limited public access along the Missouri River. Other floaters would benefit as well. At present, kayakers put in at Morony Dam and Salem Bridge on Belt Creek and enjoy the standing waves at the confluence of Belt Creek and Missouri, and the whitewater upstream of the proposed access site, and then float down to take out. Floaters can now take out with permission on the Gruel property, about 3 miles past the proposed access site, or at the Carter Ferry river access site, about 13 miles downstream.

Outfitted trips and Lewis & Clark Living History demonstration participants would probably continue to take out at Gruel's. However, for others, the proposed access site offers a couple of advantages for all floaters over the current situation: Kayakers could recreate in the 4-mile stretch between Salem Bridge on Belt Creek and proposed access site without having to float an additional 13 miles to Carter Ferry, or the Gruel site if they had permission. Those floaters and hunters wishing to avoid the whitewater stretch could put in at the proposed access site and take out downstream.

The new access and road improvements offers public access to DNRC lands for recreation. However, persons entering these state lands must still obtain a recreation use permit from DNRC. If temporary or seasonal road closures occur, signs will be posted at the intersection of Highwood Road (State Highway 228) and the access road. Signs explaining access site restrictions will be posed at this same intersection and at the access site itself. Signs would note that hunting on private land is allowed by permission only.

Effects on the viewshed from project development would be minor. The larine has been sited near the cottonwood trees and built of natural hued aggregate concrete. The boat ramp would be visible both from the river and at various intervals along the lower portions of the access road. Since proposed development is minimal and low profile, and since the opposite side of the river is undeveloped, the primary viewers would be adjacent landowners and recreationists having an interest in the site. Therefore, impacts would be minor.

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12. <u>CULTURAL/HISTORICAL RESOURCES</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
a. **Destruction or alteration of any site, structure or object of prehistoric historic, or paleontological importance?		X				
b. Physical change that would affect unique cultural values?		X				
c. Effects on existing religious or sacred uses of a site or area?		X				
d. ****For P-R/D-J, will the project affect historic or cultural resources? Attach SHPO letter of clearance. (Also see 12.a)		X				12d.
e. Other:						

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

12d. A cultural resource inventory and SHPO consultation, meeting FERC requirements, has been completed by PPL Montana on land where the boat ramp is proposed. No cultural resources were found in that particular location. Remnants of homesteader cabins and a barn exist on PPL Montana land outside the area proposed for the boat ramp and are fenced.

* Include a narrative explanation under Part III describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or can not be evaluated.

Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM)

Determine whether the described impact may result and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.

Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

SIGNIFICANCE CRITERIA

13. <u>SUMMARY EVALUATION OF SIGNIFICANCE</u> Will the proposed action, considered as a whole:	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
a. Have impacts that are individually limited, but cumulatively considerable? (A project or program may result in impacts on two or more separate resources that create a significant effect when considered together or in total.)		X				
b. Involve potential risks or adverse effects which are uncertain but extremely hazardous if they were to occur?		X				
c. Potentially conflict with the substantive requirements of any local, state, or federal law, regulation, standard or formal plan?		X				
d. Establish a precedent or likelihood that future actions with significant environmental impacts will be proposed?		X				
e. Generate substantial debate or controversy about the nature of the impacts that would be created?			X			13e.
f. ***For P-R/D-J, is the project expected to have organized opposition or generate substantial public controversy? (Also see 13e)			X			13f.
g. ****For P-R/D-J, list any federal or state permits required.						13g.

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Water Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

13e. and f. Some concern has been expressed that development of this site will increase human activity and disturbance of wildlife in the vicinity, and to some degree downstream of the site. This effect is unavoidable since the project is nearly completed; the boat ramp is all that remains for development. Several members of the recreation advisory and technical working committees have expressed the opinion that the beneficial effects of increased public recreational opportunities far outweigh this concern.

13g. Permits required before construction: FWP – 124(possible 318 permit), COE – 404, possible county weed permit, possible flood plain permit, and SHPO review.

* Include a narrative explanation under Part III describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or can not be evaluated.
 Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM)
 Determine whether the described impact may result and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.
 **** Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

PART II. ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW, CONTINUED

2. Description and analysis of reasonable alternatives (including the no action alternative) to the proposed action whenever alternatives are reasonably available and prudent to consider and a discussion of how the alternatives would be implemented:

During the 1989 summer season, Montana Power Company contracted with a private consultant to survey local residents about the kind of recreational amenities they felt were needed along the Missouri. Responses to the survey showed that people supported shoreline access but didn't feel the need for traditional highly developed camping and recreation sites. However, 67 percent of Morony Dam Access Site visitors wanted more restrooms, and about 33 percent wanted more picnic areas, drinking water facilities, and boat ramps. Twenty-five percent wanted more trails (FERC 1999).

The recreation advisory and technical working committees created in the early 1990s considered several alternatives before identifying the proposed access site as the preferred site. Alternative sites included possible acquisition of the Gruel take-out on the west side of the Missouri about 3 miles downstream, or a take-out at Portage Coulee, directly across the river from the access site. As these alternative sites were evaluated, it became clear that their distance from county roads and/or difficulty in terrain would make site and access development cost-prohibitive. In addition, the proposed site offered public access to school trust lands. In short, location alternatives were considered, but dismissed.

The no-action alternative would alleviate the minor impacts mentioned in this analysis, such as effects on soil stability, public safety, noise, and vegetation and associated impacts on wildlife. However, access to this portion of the Missouri, where little public entry now exists, would be precluded by the no-action alternative. Also, the beneficial impacts of on-site weed control, exclusion of cattle from the grasses and cottonwood stand at the access site, and protection of cultural resources would be foregone.

The specific action FWP is entertaining here is the boat ramp portion of the overall site development. If the boat ramp is not constructed it would make launching and taking out boats more difficult for floaters. A hardened boat ramp will protect the stream bank from vehicle ruts and erosion.

3. Evaluation and listing of mitigation, stipulation, or other control measures enforceable by the agency or another government agency:

None.

PART III. NARRATIVE EVALUATION AND COMMENT

The proposed boat ramp at Widow Coulee FAS is an appropriate action for Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks. FWP is the correct public agency to cooperate with PPL Montana in providing for river access amenities. FWP has funding from fishing license sales and these funds are intended for the benefit of the fishing public.

This access and the appropriate development of a boat ramp affords the public improved access to a reach of the Missouri River that has been difficult to get to because of limited public opportunity and challenging terrain. The road development and other access improvements (parking lot, latrine, signing) already in place have been well received by area recreationists. Because of power company support in operations it has been easier for FWP to give needed maintenance and enforcement patrols to the site and neighboring property owners.

The site also benefits from a broad agency partnership with Chouteau County, DNRC, BLM, PPL Montana and FWP. It is recognized as an important public opportunity to access the Missouri River.

No significant impacts were identified in the analysis of this boat ramp project by FWP.

PART IV. EA CONCLUSION SECTION

1. Based on the significance criteria evaluated in this EA, is an EIS required (YES/NO)? If an EIS is not required, explain why the EA is the appropriate level of analysis for this proposed action.

An EA is the appropriate level of analysis because no significant issues were identified and minimal public controversy is anticipated as a result of this action.

2. Describe the level of public involvement for this project if any and, given the complexity and the seriousness of the environmental issues associated with the proposed action, is the level of public involvement appropriate under the circumstances?

The recreational advisory and technical working committees, made up of members of the public and agency personnel and formed under FERC relicensing Project 2188, identified the proposed access site for recreation mitigation in 1998. The committees have been kept apprised of the stages of potential site development. PPL Montana completed a similar environmental analysis for site development in May 2000 and found no significant impacts to the environment.

Members of the committees will be notified of EA availability and those who express an interest will receive a copy for review. Members of the general public will receive notice via press releases and legal notices in the Great Falls Tribune and the River Press, local newspapers.

3. Duration of comment period, if any.

The public comment period will extend for no less than thirty (30) days following the publication of the legal notice. Written comments will be accepted from 8:00 a.m., February 5th until 5:00 p.m., March 8th, 2002 and can be mailed to the address below:

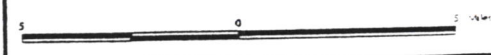
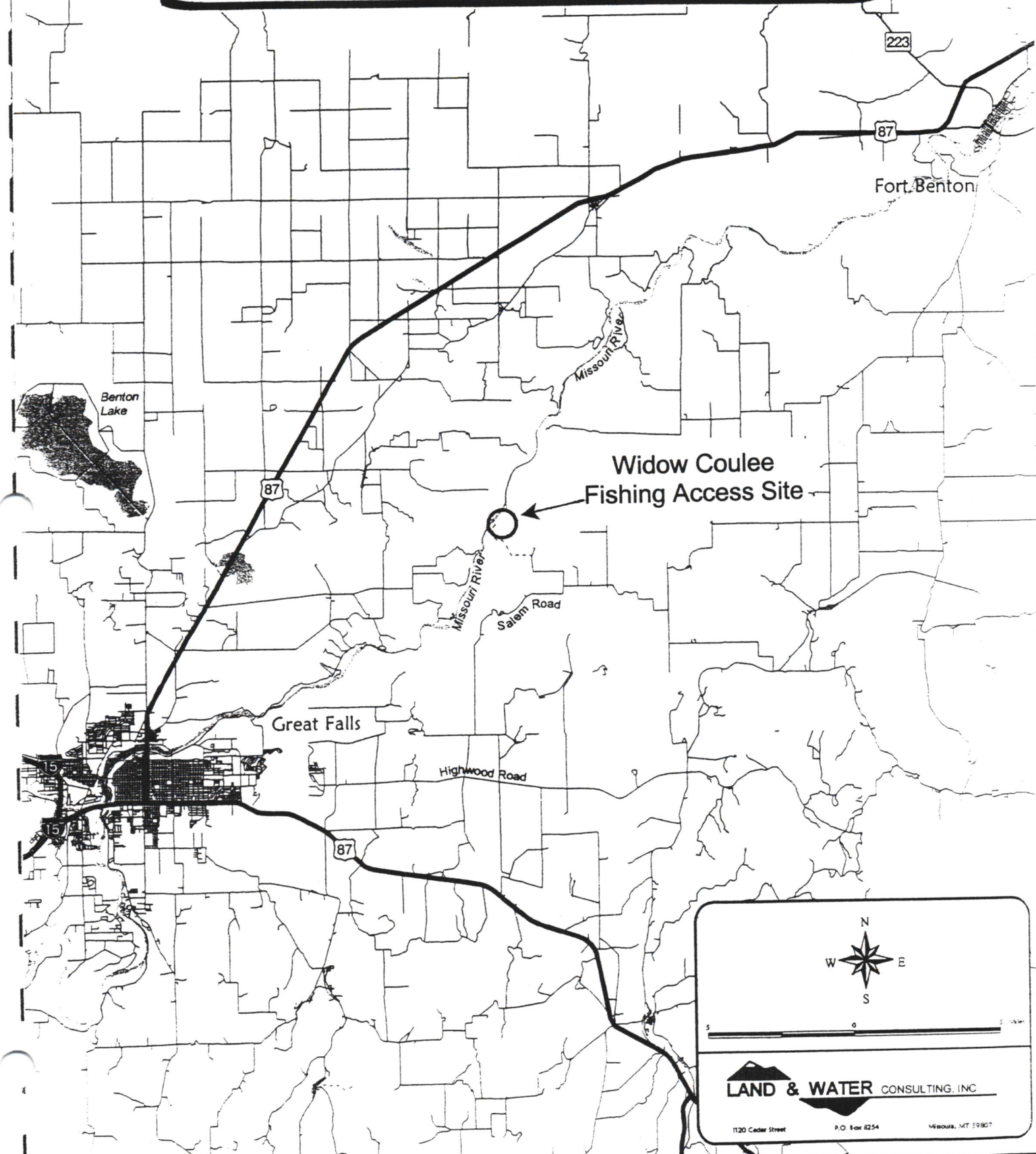
Widow Coulee FAS Boat Ramp
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Attention: Dave Todd
4600 Giant Springs Road
Great Falls, MT 59405

Or e-mailed to: dtodd@state.mt.us

4. Name, title, address and phone number of the person(s) responsible for preparing the EA:

Dave Todd
Region Park Manager
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
4600 Giant Springs Road
Great Falls, MT 59405
406-454-5840

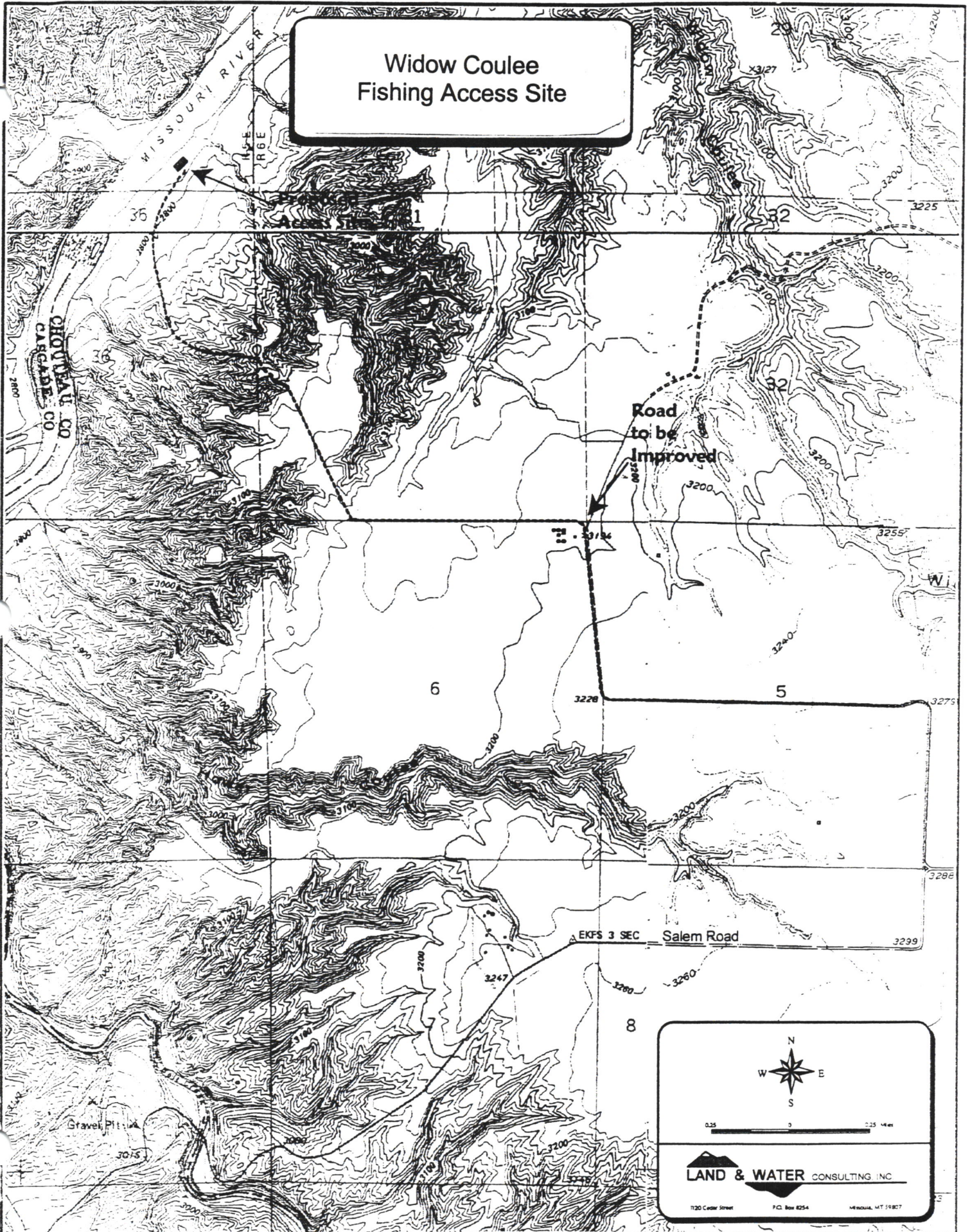
General Vicinity of Widow Coulee FAS



LAND & WATER CONSULTING, INC.

1120 Cedar Street P.O. Box 8254 Missoula, MT 59807

Widow Coulee
Fishing Access Site



**Shogun's Fish,
Wishes & Prayers**

Widow Coulee
at Great Falls, MT

